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Review of *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle: How the United States Army Waged War on the Northern Plains, 1876-1877* by Paul L. Hedren

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BOOK REVIEWS

Great Sioux War Orders of Battle: How the United States Army Waged War on the Northern Plains, 1876–1877. By Paul L. Hedren. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2011. 240 pp. Map, appendices, bibliography, index. \$39.95.

The Great Sioux War of 1876–77 was the greatest Indian war ever fought by the United States government. That, together with the continued fascination of the Little Bighorn, has generated enough books and articles to fill a small library. Most follow a common thread of narration or analysis, but Paul L. Hedren's *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle* takes a different approach. Divided into three parts, it covers the 1876 army, its mission and strategy in the Plains, deployment and tactics, and analysis.

On the surface, this would seem like a book for the specialist. However, the body of text is supplemented by seven appendices sorting out the various military terms, staff and field officers, company-grade officers, and medical officers, with lists of all those engaged, prior experience, and casualties. Thus *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle* becomes useful for the nonspecialist who is not necessarily familiar with rank, battle experience, or terminology.

The appendix listing officers and their prior experience backs Hedren's contention that a substantial percentage understood Indian warfare in the Great Plains. This counters the frequent notion that the war was fought in an amateurish fashion, by Civil War officers still mentally fighting Confederates. To the contrary, he contends that the Civil War had provided officers with basic combat and command experience. From early setbacks on the frontier in the late 1860s, officers became increasingly skilled at their jobs, so that by 1876 they formed a competent foundation around which the war could be pursued.

In the second part Hedren lists the twenty-six deployments made during the war, from

the Fort Pease Relief expedition of February–March 1876 to the final deployments along the Tongue River and Little Missouri, and the establishment of Big Horn Post (later Fort Custer) in the summer of 1877. He summarizes each deployment and lists all the officers and units involved.

In his conclusions, Hedren reconciles his endorsement of the officers and basic campaign strategy with debacles such as the Powder River and Little Bighorn. He points out there is not only an order of battle but disorder *in* battle. Human error and confusion come into play. Nevertheless, by the time the war ended, the power of the Northern Plains tribes was permanently broken, securing the region for settlement and development.

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